



## Matakohē-Limestone Island Ranger Report – September 2012

The big news on the island this month is our third (and least effective) ranger celebrated her first birthday - just seems like yesterday we jumped in the dinghy and sped off to Whangarei to have her. As far as percentages of time spent on the island go, she's a serious local. Her highlights island life thus far include kiwi chicks, geckos, fantails and two very special dogs that visited just before her birthday. Occi and Cody are the only dogs that are allowed on the island due to their special certifications. They came across with their expert handlers, Miriam Ritchie and Ang Newport from DOC, to have a sniff around for pests. We wanted to see if we could find any small pockets of mice that might be hanging on in remote places on the island. Occi and Cody are specially trained to detect pests and to be safe around our precious native animals such as kiwi. After a comprehensive sniff, the island was conspicuously clean with one very isolated possible sign next to a chewed bait station (so we probably got him). Mouse man Bernie had tracked one close by recently so it was nice to know it had gobbled down some poison and hadn't bred and multiplied. We have not detected any in the tracking tunnels since. A big thanks to Miriam, Ang, Occi, Cody and Adrian Walker from DOC for organising.



**Left: Birthday girl and co. beg for a sandwich. Right: Miriam, Occi, Cody and Ang**

Keeping the island pest-free is the most important job for us, equal to making sure the island doesn't burn down. To do this we have enlisted some expert help with trapping and baiting for the summer. James Brooks was a huge help last year and has returned to wage war on all things furry. We are aiming for no incursions this summer, with help from Greg Chisnall over at Onerahi. If pests re-established themselves on the island, the rest of this ranger report would be very boring as there would be no native animals to talk about, so thankfully we are on top of things and the native critters are going off!

## Fauna

Our old dotterel friends down on the sand barge, "Mowgli" and mate, are just minutes away from hatching their first chicks for the year. Being a very clucky dad I had to sneak through the no go barrier (one of the perks of being the ranger) and check how many eggs they had... three perfectly camouflaged bundles of "Nationally vulnerable".



- If you too like NZ dotterels you can vote for them in the "Forest and Bird", Bird of the Year competition <http://www.birdoftheyear.org.nz/>. But don't be too hasty, perhaps I could tempt you into voting for one of the other fine bird species lurking on Matakoho Limestone Island.



- For example check out the smallest bird in New Zealand, the grey-warbler. Jo snapped this pic of a brand new fledgling out the back door. Very cute.



- Or perhaps Caspian terns tickle your fancy? We had a huge turn out for the Wed Wollys and got seriously stuck into the weeds on Knight Island to give the birds some space to nest. It is looking stunning there now and they are starting to make their scrapes. We also got stuck into periwinkle back on Limestone. Thanks for the big help guys and girls.
- The fantails have beautiful nests just outside the house. We'll be overrun with fledglings before you know it.
- There have been a number of Eastern rosellas lurking around, which is kinda nice. "Kinda" because they are beautiful, but they also quite aggressive towards other birds.
- Damian Smith and Thalia Sachtleben have been doing a fernbird census on the northern face using taped calls. These birds are very territorial so you can map where each pair lives. As expected they are jam packed. So far Damian and Thalia looked at about a third of the grass area and there are over 15 pairs. Fern birds will be getting my vote for bird of the year. I never get sick of seeing them disappearing into the undergrowth.
- Damian has also been giving me a hand with forest gecko monitoring and found a beautiful female. Because they are so cryptic this is the first time we've been able to relocate them since they were released.



**Budding fernbird specialist and geckoman Damian and his exciting discovery**

## **Kiwi**

- I'd like to be able to report hatching kiwi chicks but ol' Sir Ed is certainly taking his time. The poor chap has been incubating for 100 days now. That's over a quarter of a year. What commitment! Glen is due in October but he also likes to take his time so don't get too excited just yet.
- Todd Hamilton has brought across three perfect little chicks this month. Sadly it would have been four but a stoat got one of them before he could save it. It really highlights the importance of Matakohe-Limestone as a crèche site for our National icon as they are so vulnerable when they are young. Nice work Todd.

## General

- Richard Aubrey and John Craig very kindly let us collect rabbits from their land. We are always on the look out for rabbits to use as stoat bait so if you have any spares please let us know.
- As well as trapping, James has been helping us sort out rubbish, cut bait lines, planting, weeding and has been cleaning up rubbish on the Onerahi foreshore.
- Stuart Jackson (WDC) and Paul Butturini (Parkcare) came out to have a look at the tracks and we are hoping to start upgrading.
- Northtec came out and I gave them a lecture on pest management before sending them off to do some pest control.
- I've been tidying up after winter including catching up on mowing and re-liming the roads.
- I gave a talk about lizards to the Aroha Island Trust in the Bay of Islands and another one to U3A about restoration on the island.
- Lots of lizard reports finished and off to DOC.
- We also managed to squeeze in a week off the island.

## Upcoming

- Volunteer Wednesday on **October 3rd**. Pick up at the jetty at the usual time – **9am**. If it is really, really calm we'll go to Rabbit Island. Otherwise I'll think of something else.

Hei konei ra

Ben, Jo and of course young Penny Kohe



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